

VANCOUVER, BC • MARCH 15-16, 2026

ASE 2026

Dr. Ambedkar Symposium on Emancipation

Overcoming Caste Barriers for Social and Economic Equality

MARCH 15 SFU Harbour Center, Room 2270, 515 Hastings Street, Vancouver

MARCH 16 University of British Columbia, The Robson Centre, Vancouver

ASE 2026

March 15

SFU Harbour
Center, Room
2270,
515 Hastings
Street, Vancouver

March 16

University of
British Columbia,
The Robson
Centre,
Vancouver

DR. AMBEDKAR SYMPOSIUM ON EMANCIPATION (ASE 2026): OVERCOMING CASTE BARRIERS FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EQUALITY



March 16, 7:00 PM

Film Screening:

ORIGIN

Followed by discussion

The Cinematheque Theatre,
1131 Howe Street,
Vancouver



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Event Outline

DAY 1 — SUNDAY, MARCH 15 · SFU HARBOUR CENTRE, ROOM 2270, 515 HASTINGS STREET, VANCOUVER

8:00 AM	Set Up
9:00 AM	Opening Ceremony
9:30 AM	Keynote Address: Why Canada Must Add Caste as a Protected Category in Human Rights Codes? <i>Moderator: Mr. Major Mal, President, Ambedkar International Society of Calgary (Canada)</i> <i>Presenter: Dr. Drona Rasali (The University of Memphis Law School, 2023 & Chair, Global Conference for a Caste Free World 2025, Toronto)</i> <i>recorded presentation</i>
10:00 AM	Break

Why Canada Must Add Caste as a Protected Category in Human Rights Codes?

DRONA PRAKSH RASALI, PHD, FACE, DSF

❖ *Chair, Sahayatra International Alliance for Social Justice, Toronto, Canada*

❖ *Adjunct Professor,
School of Population and Public Health.
University of British Columbia*



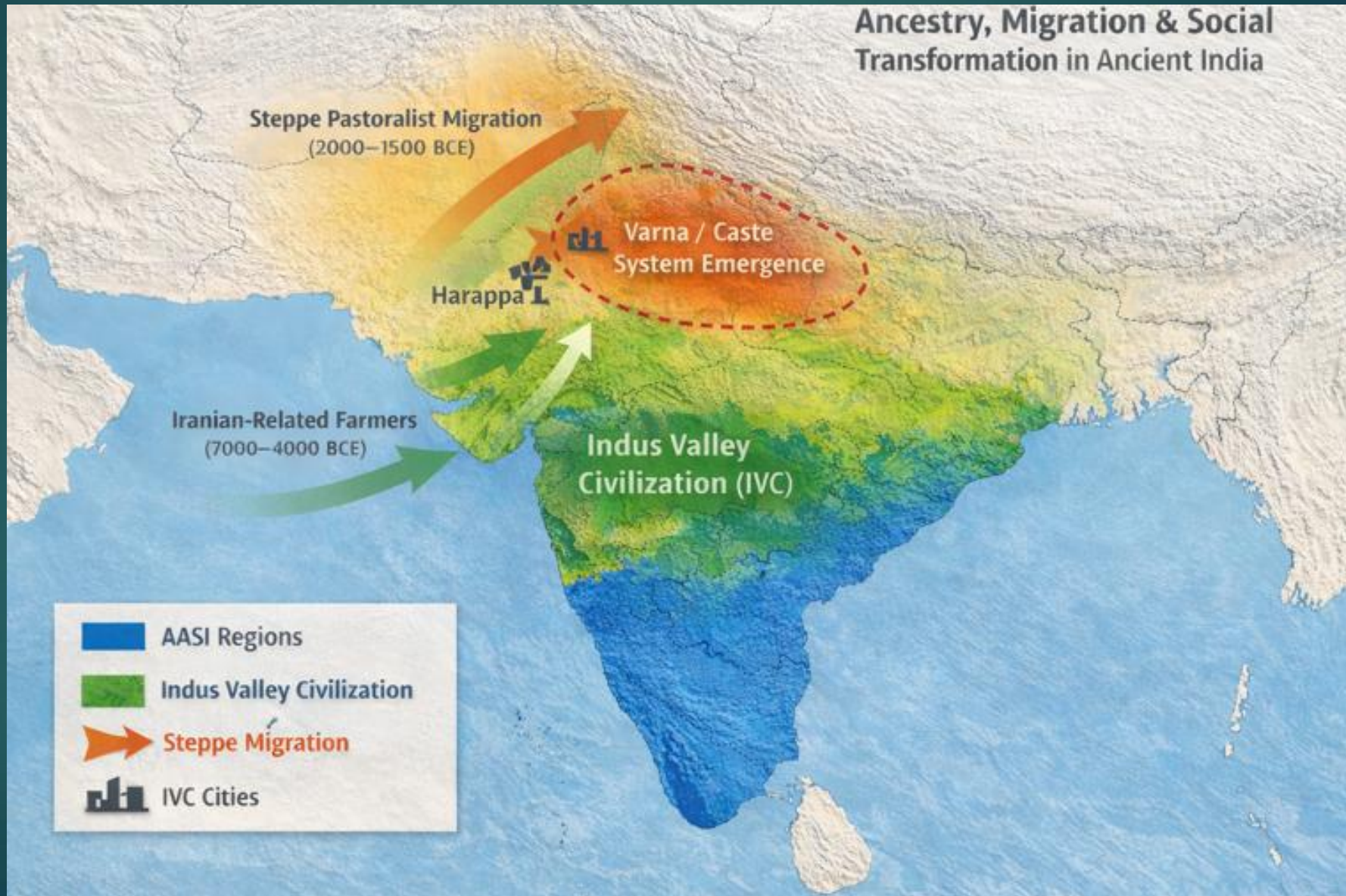
Introduction

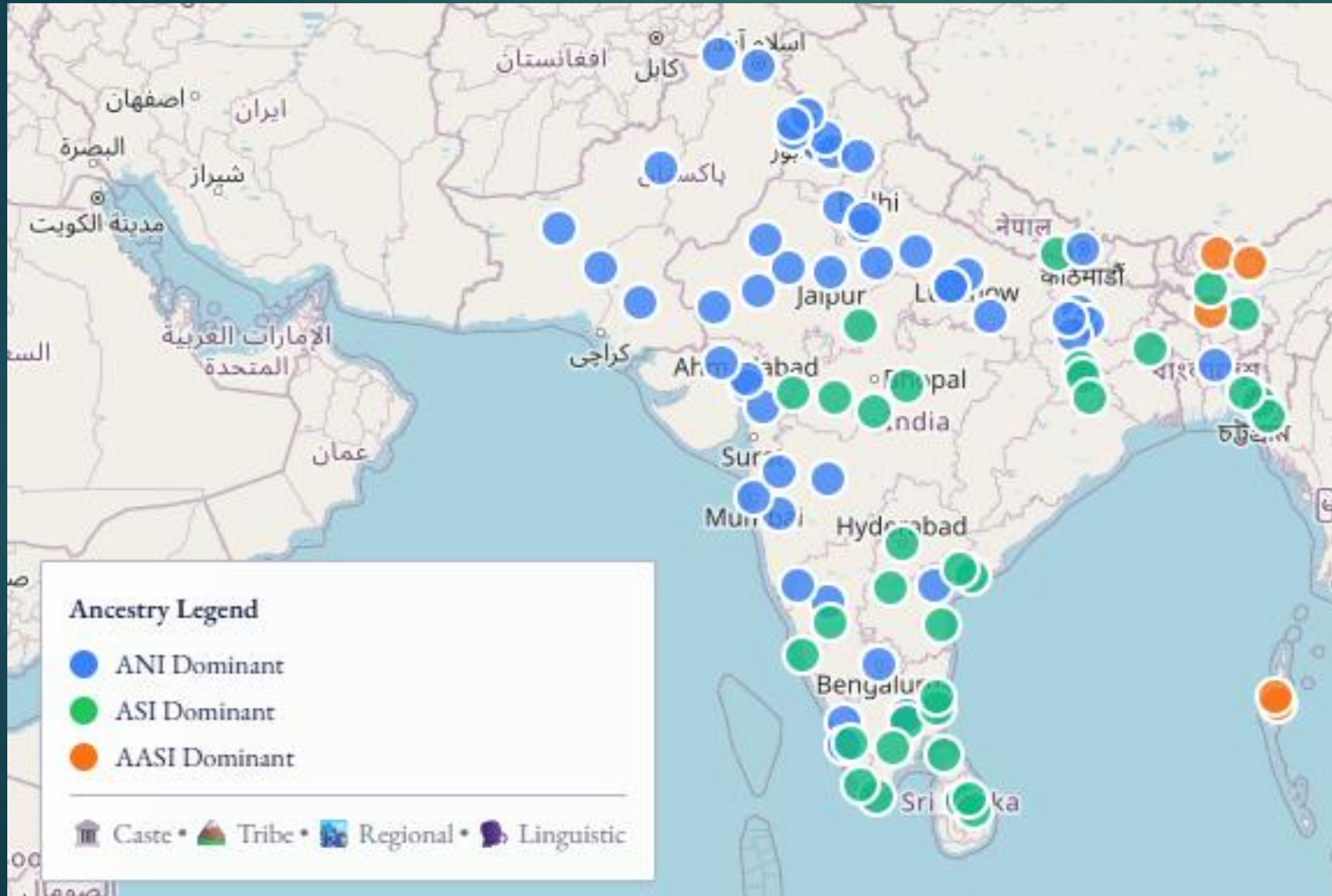
- ▶ Caste-based discrimination and untouchability represent one of the most complete forms of dehumanization and social exclusion known, distinct in its permanence and metaphysical justification.
- ▶ Debunking mythology and pseudoscience, genomic and anthropological studies provide evidence-based story of peopling of Indian subcontinent.
- ▶ I relate my presentation to pre-historic context in South Asia leading through to contemporary issues in South Asia, the UK and North America.

The Science: Debunking the Myths

- ▶ Caste-based discrimination and untouchability represent one of the most complete forms of dehumanization and social exclusion known, distinct in its permanence and metaphysical justification.
- ▶ Debunking mythology and pseudoscience, genomic and anthropological studies provide evidence-based story of peopling of Indian subcontinent.
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Ancient Ancestry & Social Transformation- Varna/Caste Emergence





ANCIENT ANCESTRAL SOUTH INDIAN (AASI) -

Hunter-gatherer ancestry similar to Andaman Islanders, representing the earliest inhabitants of South Asia.

ANCESTRAL NORTH INDIAN (ANI)-

Related to populations from the Pontic-Caspian steppe and ancient Middle Eastern farmers. Higher in northern populations and so called upper castes.

ANCESTRAL SOUTH INDIAN (ASI)-

Represents genetic heritage related to ancient South Asian populations, possibly associated with Indus Valley Civilization.

Recent anthropological and genomic evidence (Rasali et al., 2024)



- ▶ The ancient source of peopling Indian subcontinent includes the ancient migration of Steppe Mountain pastoralists & Anatoli-Iranian farmers from the North and West, East Asians from the North- East to form admixture with the Indigenous people.
- ▶ The dominant groups initiated imposing social stratification leading to caste/racial discrimination between groups during the transition from pastoralism to agriculture.
- ▶ Casteism and all other descent-based social stratification systems have the same core elements: dehumanization, inequality, and condemnation by a dominant group overpowers a marginalized group with the sole purpose of holding on to their resources by exercising privilege and power.

The Moral Contradiction

There is also a deeper ethical issue we must confront. South Asians in Western countries rightly challenge racism and discrimination. But we must ask ourselves an uncomfortable question: Can we fight injustice externally while ignoring it internally?

The great social reformer Babasaheb Dr. B. R. Ambedkar argued decades ago that caste survives primarily through endogamy — through controlled marriage and social separation. Modern genetics has validated his insight. When science rejects the pseudoscientific idea of biological hierarchy, continuing caste prejudice becomes purely a moral decision. A choice to preserve hierarchy — or dismantle it.

The Caste Issue in Canada and the US

- ▶ Caste discrimination has migrated into North American academic campuses through diasporic communities.
- ▶ Manifests as bullying, exclusion, biased assessments, and barriers to leadership in academia.
- ▶ Leads to chronic stress, mental health issues, and health disparities.
- ▶ Caste remains absent in most DEI frameworks in Canada and the US.
- ▶ Its recognition as a protected category in the Human Rights Codes is vital for justice and inclusion.

Public Health Imperatives

- ▶ Caste oppression contributes to chronic stress and mental health issues.
- ▶ Leads to higher rates of depression, anxiety, and preventable diseases.
- ▶ Exclusion creates intergenerational trauma.
- ▶ Caste discrimination is a structural determinant of health.

Policy Gaps and Challenges

- ▶ Caste often conflated with religion, leading to resistance and accusations of 'Hinduphobia.' despite the victims are part of Hindu fold
- ▶ Lack of explicit DEI inclusion leaves institutions unprepared.
- ▶ Discrimination thrives in ambiguity.
- ▶ Need for clarity and explicit recognition.

Global Context

- ▶ Over 260 million people worldwide affected by caste discrimination.
- ▶ UN, Human Rights Watch, Equality Labs recognize caste as global issue.
- ▶ Seattle banned caste discrimination in 2023.
- ▶ UK institutions (Oxford, BBC) have caste equity measures.
- ▶ California debated explicit caste ban (2023–24).

Proposed Solutions

- ▶ Recognize caste explicitly as a protected category in federal/provincial human rights codes.
- ▶ Educate institutions and employers on caste discrimination.
- ▶ Fund Dalit-led and anti-caste research and Dalit empowering organizations.
- ▶ Collect data on caste-based discrimination.
- ▶ Build inclusive DEI frameworks.

Key Institutional Developments in Canada

- ▶ Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) recognition of caste discrimination.
- ▶ Toronto District School Board (TDSB) policy action against caste-based bullying.
- ▶ British Columbia Human Rights Tribunal rulings on caste discrimination.
- ▶ Burnaby and Brampton city motions to include caste as a protected category.
- ▶ Dalit History Month declaration in British Columbia Government, Canada (April 2025).

Conclusion

- ▶ Caste discrimination is not just a cultural relic but a systemic injustice in Canada and the US.
- ▶ Breaking caste chains is essential for human rights, humanity and social justice.
- ▶ Legal recognition is crucial for equity in academia and society.
- ▶ Canada and the US must align with social equity norms.
- ▶ Recognizing caste as a protected category is a moral imperative and policy necessity.

Thank you !